Pages 21—28.

The Sun.

Pages 21—28.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1891.

THE QUALITY OF MERCY

A Story of Contemporary American Life.

By WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS.

PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

Northwick's man met him at the station with the cutter. The train was a little late and Elbridge was a little early; after a few moments of formal waiting he began to walk the clipped horses up and down the street. As they walked they sent those quivers and thrills over their thin coats which horses can give at will; they moved their heads up and down slowly and easily, and made their bells jangle noisily together; the bursts of sound evoked by their firm and nervous pace died back in showers and falling drops of music. All the time Elbridge swore at them affectionately, with the unconscious profanity of the rustic Yankee whose lot has been much cast with horses. In the halts he made at each return to the station, he let his blasphemies bubble sociably from him in response to the friendly imprecations of the three or four other drivers who were waiting for the train; they had apparently no other parlance. The drivers of the hotel 'bus and of the local express wagon were particular friends; they gave each other to perdition at every other word; a growing boy, who had come to meet Mr. Gerrish, the merchant, with the family sleigh, made himself a fountain of meaningless maledictions; the public hackman, who admired Elbridge almost as much as he respected Elbridge's horses (they were really Northwick's, but the professional convention was that they were Elbridge's), clothed them with fond curses as with a garment. He was himself, more literally speaking, clothed in an old ulster, much frayed about the wrists and skirts, and polished across the middle of the back by rubbing against counters and window sills. He was bearded like a patriarch, and he wore a rusty fur cap pulled down over his ears, though it was not very cold; its peak rested on the point of his nose, so that he had to throw his head far back to get Elbridge in the field of his vision. Elbridge had on a high hat, and was smoothly buttoned to his throat in a plain coachman's coat of black; Northwick had never cared to have him make a closer approach to a livery; and it is doubtful if Elbridge would have done it if he had asked or ordered it of him. He deferred to Northwick in a measure as the owner of his horses, but he did not defer to him in any other quality.

"Say, Elbridge, when you goin' to give me that old hat o'your'n?" asked the hackman, in a shout that would have reached Elbridge if he had been half a mile off instead of half a rod.

"What do you want of another second-hand hat, you —— —— old fool, you?" asked Elbridge in his turn.

The hackman doubled himself down for joy, and slapped his leg; at the sound of a whistle to the eastward, he pulled himself erect again, and said, as if the fact were one point gained, "Well, there she blows, any way." Then he went round the corner of the station to be in full readiness for any chance passenger the train might improbably bring him.

No one alighted but Mr. Gerrish and Northwick. Mr. Gerrish found it most remarkable that he should have come all the way from Boston on the same train with Northwick and not known it; but Northwick was less disposed to wonder at it. He passed rapidly beyond the following of Mr. Gerrish, and mounted to the place Elbridge made for him in the cutter. While Elbridge was still tucking the robes about their legs, Northwick drove away from the station, and through the village up to the rim of the highland that lies between Hatboro' and South Hatboro'. The bare line cut along the horizon where the sunset lingered in a light of liquid crimson, paling and passing into weaker violet tints with every moment, but still tenderly flushing the walls of the sky, and holding longer the accent of its color where a keen star had here and there already pierced it and shone quivering through. The shortest days were past, but in the first week of February they had not lengthened sensibly, though to a finer perception there was the promise of release from the winter dark, if not from the winter cold. It was not far from 6 o'clock when Northwick mounted the southward rise of the street; it was still almost light enough to read; and the little slender black figure of a man that started up in the middle of the road, as if it had risen out of the ground, had an even vivid distinctness. He must have been lying in the snow; the horses crouched back with a sudden recoil, as if he had struck them back with his arm, and plunged the runners of the cutter into the deeper snow beside the beaten track. He made a slight pause, long enough to give Northwick a contemptuous glance, and then continued along the road at a leisurely pace to the deep cut through the snow from the next house. Here he stood regarding such difficulty as Northwick had in quieting his horses and getting under way again. He said nothing, and Northwick did not speak; Elbridge growled, "He's on one of his tears again," and the horses dashed forward with a shriek of all their bells. Northwick did not open his lips till he entered the avenue of firs that led from the highway to his house; they were still clogged with the snowfall, and their lowermost branches were buried in the drifts.

"What's the matter with the colt?" he asked.

"I don't know as that fellow understands the colt's feet very well. I guess one of the shoes is set wrong," said Elbridge.

"Better look after it."

Northwick left Elbridge the reins, and got out of the cutter at the flight of granite steps which rose to the ground floor of his wooden palace. Broad levels of piazza stretched away from the entrance under a portico of that carpentry which so often passes with us for architecture. In spite of the effect of organic flimsiness in every wooden structure but a log cabin, or a fisherman's cottage shingled to the ground, the house suggested a perfect functional comfort. There were double windows on all round the piazzas; a mellow glow from the incandescent electrics penetrated to the outer dusk from them; when the door was opened to Northwick, a pleasant heat gushed out, together with the perfume of flowers and the odors of dinner.

"Dinner is just served, sir," said the inside man, disposing of Northwick's overcoat and hat on the hall table with respectful scruple.

Northwick hesitated. He stood over the register, and vaguely held his hands in the pleasant warmth indirectly radiated from the steam pipes below.

"The young ladies were just thinking you wouldn't be home till the next train," the man suggested, at the sound of voices from the dining room.

"They have some one with them?" Northwick asked.

"Yes, sir. The rector, sir; Mr. Wade, sir."

"I'll come down by and by," Northwick said, turning to the stairs. "Say I had a late lunch before I left town."

"Yes, sir," said the man.

Northwick went on up stairs, with footfalls hushed by the thickly padded thick carpet, and turned into the sort of study that opened out of his bedroom. It had been his wife's parlor during the few years of her life in the house which he had built for her, which they had planned to spend their old age in together. It faced southward, and looked out over the greenhouses and the gardens that stretched behind the house to the bulk of woods, shutting out the stage picturesqueness of the summer settlement of South Hatboro'. She had herself put the rocking chair in the sunny bay window, and Northwick had not allowed it to be disturbed there since her death. In an alcove at one side he had made a place for the safe where he kept his papers; his wife had intended to keep their silver in it, but she had been scared by the notion of having burglars so close to them in the night, and had always left the silver in the safe in the dining room.

She was all her life a timorous creature, and after her marriage had seldom felt safe out of Northwick's presence. Her portrait, by Hunt, hanging over the mantelpiece, suggested something of this, though the painter had made the most of her thin, middle-aged blond good looks, and had given her a substance of general character which was more expressive of his own free and bold style than of the facts in the case. She was really one of those hen-minded women, who are so common in all walks of life, and are made up of only one aim at a time, and of manifold anxieties at all times. Her instinct for saving long survived the days of struggle in which she had joined it to Northwick's instinct for getting; she lived and died in the hope, if not the belief, that she had contributed to his prosperity by looking strictly after all manner of valueless odds and ends. But he had been passively happy with her. Since her death he had allowed her to return much into his thoughts, from which her troublesome solicitudes and her entire uselessness in important matters had obliged him to push her while she lived. He often had times when it seemed to him that he was thinking of nothing, and then he found that he had been thinking of her. At such times, with a pang, he realized that he missed her; but perhaps the wound was to habit rather than affection. He now sat down in his swivel chair and turned it from the writing desk, which stood on the rug before the fireplace, and looked up into the eyes of her effigy with a sense of her intangible presence in it, and with a dumb longing to rest his soul against hers. She was the only one who could have seen him in his wish to have not been what he was; she would have denied it to his face if he had told her he was a thief; and as he meant to make himself more and more a thief, her love would have eased the way by full acceptance of the theories that ran along with his intentions and covered them with pretences of necessity. He thought how even his own mother could not have been so much comfort to him; she would have had the mercy, but she would not have had the folly. At the bottom of his heart, and under all his pretences, Northwick knew that it was not mercy which would help him; but he wanted it, as we all want what is comfortable and bad for us at times. With the performance and purpose of a thief in his heart, he turned to the pictured face of his dead wife as his refuge from the face of all living. It could not look at him as if he were a thief.

The word so filled his mind that it seemed always about to slip from his tongue. It was what the President of the Board had called him when the fact of his fraudulent manipulation of the company's books was laid so distinctly before him that even the insane refusal which the criminal instinctively makes of his crime in its presence was impossible. The other directors sat blankly round and said nothing; not because they hated a scene, but because the ordinary course of life among us had not supplied them with the emotional materials for making one. The President, however, had jumped from his seat and advanced upon Northwick. "What does all this mean, sir? I'll tell you what it means. It means that you're a thief, sir; the same as if you had picked my pocket or stolen my horse or taken my overcoat out of my hall."

He shook his clenched fist in Northwick's face, and seemed about to take him by the throat. Afterward he inclined more to mercy than the others; it was he who carried the vote which allowed Northwick three days' grace to look into his affairs and lay before the directors the proof that he had ample means, as he maintained, to meet the shortage in the accounts. "I wish you well out of it for your family's sake," he said at parting, "but all the same, sir, you are a thief."

He put his hands ostentatiously in his pockets when some others meaninglessly shook hands with Northwick at parting, as Northwick himself might have shaken hands with another in his place; and he brushed by him out of the door without looking at him. He came suddenly back to say, "If it were a question of you alone, I would cheerfully lose something more than you've robbed me of for the pleasure of seeing you handcuffed in this room and led to jail through the street by a constable. No honest man, no man who was not always a rogue at heart, could have done what you've done; juggled with the books for years, and bewitched the record so by your infernal craft, that it was never suspected till now. You've given mind to your scoundrelly work, sir; all the mind you had; for if you hadn't been so anxious to steal successfully you'd have given more mind to the use of your stealings. You may have some of them left, but it looks as if you'd made ducks and drakes of them, like any petty rascal in the hands of the Employes' Insurance Company. Yes, sir, I believe you're of about the intellectual calibre of that sort of thief. I can't respect you even on your own ground. But I'm willing to give you the chance you ask, for your daughter's sake. She's been in and out of my house with my girl like one of my own children, and I won't send her father to jail if I can help it. Understand! I haven't any sentiment for you, Northwick. You're the kind of rogue I'd like to see in a convict's jacket learning to make shoe brushes. But you shall have your chance to go home and see if you can pay up somehow, and you sha'n't be shadowed while you're at it. You shall keep your outside to the world three days longer, you whited sepulchre; but if you want to know, I think the best thing that could happen to you on your way home would be a good railroad accident."

The man's words and looks were burnt into Northwick's memory, which now seemed to have the faculty of simultaneously reproducing them all. Northwick remembered his purple face, with its prominent eyes, and the swing of his large stomach, and just how it struck against the jamb as he whirled a second time out of the door. The other directors, some of them, stood round buttoned up in their overcoats, with their hats on, and a sort of stunned aspect; some held their hats in their hands, and looked down into them with a decorous absence of expression, as people do at a funeral. Then they left him alone in the treasurer's private room, with its official luxury of thick Turkey rugs, leathern armchairs, and nickel-plated cuspidors standing one on each side of the hearth where a fire of soft coal in a low-down grate burned with a subdued and respectful flicker.

CHAPTER II.

If it had not been for the boisterous indignation of the President, Northwick might have come away from the meeting, after the exposure of his defalcations, with an unimpaired personal dignity. But as it was, he felt curiously shrunken and shattered, till the prevailing habit of his mind enabled him to piece himself together again and resume his former size and shape. This happened very quickly; he had conceived of himself so long as a man employing funds in his charge in speculations sometimes successful and sometimes not, but at all times secured by his personal probity and reliability. He had, in fact, more than once restored all that he had taken, and he had come to trust himself in the course of these transactions as fully as he was trusted by the men who were ignorant of his irregularities. He was somehow flattered by the complete confidence they reposed in him, though he really felt it to be no more than his due; he had always merited and received the confidence of men associated with him in business, and he had come to regard the funds of the corporation as practically his own. In the early days of his connection with the company, it largely owed its prosperity to his wise and careful management; one might say that it was not until the last, when he got so badly caught by that drop in railroads, that he had felt anything wrong to his convertible use of its money. It was an informality; he would not have denied that, but it was merely an informality. Then his losses suddenly leaped beyond his ability to make them good; then, for the first time, he began to practice that system in keeping the books which the furious President called juggling with them. Even this measure he considered a justifiable means of self-defence pending the difficulties which beset him, and until he could make his losses good by other operations. From time to time he was more fortunate, and whenever he dramatized himself in an explanation to the directors, as he often did, especially of late, he easily satisfied them as to the nature of his motives and the propriety of his behavior by calling their attention to these successful deals, and to the probability, the entire probability, that he could be at any moment in a position to repay all he had borrowed of the company. He called it borrowing, and in his long habit of making himself these loans and returning them, he had come to have a sort of vague feeling that the company was privy to them; that it was almost an understood thing. The President's violence was the first intimation to reach him in the heart of his artificial consciousness that his action was at all in the line of those foolish peculators whose discovery and flight to Canada was the commonplace of every morning's paper; such a commonplace that he had been sensible of an effort in the papers to vary the tiresome repetition of the same old fact by some novel grace of wit, or some fresh picturesqueness in putting it. In the presence of the directors he had refused to admit it to himself; but after they adjourned, and he was left alone, he realized the truth. He was like those fools, exactly like them, in what they had done, and in the way of doing it; he was like them in motive and principle. All of them had used others' money in speculation, expecting to replace it, had not been able to replace it, and then had skipped, as the newspapers said.

Whether he should complete the parallel and skip, too, was a point which he had not yet acknowledged to himself that he had decided. He never had believed that it need come to that; but, for an instant, when the President said he could wish him nothing better on his way home than a good railroad accident, it flashed upon him that one of the three alternatives before him was to skip. He had the choice to kill himself, which was supposed to be the gentlemanly way out of his difficulties, and would leave his family unstained by his crime; that matter had sometimes been discussed in his presence, and every one had agreed that it was the only thing for a gentleman to do after he had pilfered people of money he could not pay back. There was something else that a man of other instincts and weaker fibre might do, and that was to stand his trial for embezzlement, and take his punishment. Or a man, if he was that kind of a man, could skip. The question with Northwick was whether he was that kind of man, or whether, if he skipped, he would be that kind of man; whether the skipping would make him that kind of man.

The question was a cruel one for the self-respect which he had so curiously kept intact. He had been respectable ever since he was born; if he was born with any instinct it was the instinct of respectability, the wish to be honored for what he seemed. It was all the stronger in him because his father had never had it; perhaps an hereditary trait found expression in him after passing over one generation; perhaps an ante-natal influence formed him to that type. His mother was always striving to keep the man she had married worthy of her choice in the eyes of her neighbors; but he had never seconded her efforts. He had been educated a doctor, but never practised medicine; in carrying on the drug and book business of the village, he cared much more for the literary than the pharmaceutical side of it; he liked to have a circle of cronies about the wood stove in his store till midnight, and discuss morals and religion with them; and one night, when denying the planary inspiration of the Scriptures, he went to the wrong jar for an ingredient of the prescription he was making up; the patient died of his mistake. The disgrace and the disaster broke his wife's heart; but he lived on to a vague and colorless old age, supported by his son in a total disoccupation. The elder Northwick used sometime to speak of his son and his success in the world; not boastfully, but with a certain sarcasm for the source of his bounty, as a boy who had always disappointed him by a narrowness of ambition. He called him Milt, and he said he supposed now Milt was the most self-satisfied man in Massachusetts; he implied that there were better things than material success. He did not say what they were, and he could have found very few people in that village to agree with him, or to admit that the Treasurer of the Ponkwasset Mills had come in anywise short of the destiny of a man whose father had started him in life with the name of John Milton. They called him Milt, too, among themselves, and perhaps here and there a bolder spirit might have called him so to his face if he had ever come back to the village. But he had not. He had, as they had all heard, that splendid summer place at Hatboro', where he spent his time when he was not at his house in Boston, and when they verified the fact of his immense prosperity by inquiry of some of the summer folks who knew him or knew about him, they were obscurely flattered by the fact; just as many of us are proud of belonging to a nation in which we are enriched by the fellow-citizenship of many manifold millionaires. They did not blame Northwick for never coming to see his father, or for never having him home on a visit; they daily saw what old Northwick was, and how little he was fitted for the society of a man whose respectability, even as it was reflected upon them, was so dazzling. Old Northwick had never done anything for Milt; he had never even got along with him; the fellow had left him and made his own way, and the old man had no right to talk; if Milt was ever of a mind to cut off his rations, the old man would soon see.

CHAPTER III.

The local opinion scarcely did justice to old Northwick's imperfect discharge of a father's duties; his critics could not have realised how much some capacities, if not tastes, which Northwick had inherited, contributed to that very effect of respectability which they revered. The early range of books, the familiarity with the mere exterior of literature, restricted as it was, helped Northwick later to pass for a man of education, if not of reading, with men who were themselves less read than educated. The people whom his ability threw him with in Boston were all Harvard men, and they could not well conceive of an acquaintance, so gentlemanly and quiet as Northwick, who was not college bred, too. By unmistakable signs, which we carry through life, they knew he was from the country, and they attributed him to a fresh-water college. They said, "You're a Dartmouth man, Northwick, I believe," or "I think you're from Williams," and when Northwick said no, they forgot it and thought that he was a a Bowdoin man; the impression gradually fixed itself that he was from one or other of those colleges. It was believed in like manner, partly on account of his name, that he was from one of those old ministerial families that you find up in the hills, where the whole brood study Greek while they are sugaring off in the spring, and that his own mother had fitted him for college. There was, in fact, something clerical in Northwick's bearing, and it was felt by some that he had studied for the ministry, but had gone into business to help his family. The literary phase of the superstition concerning him was humored by the library which formed such a striking feature of his house in Boston, as well as his house in Hatboro'; at Hatboro' it was really vast, and was so charming and so luxurious that it gave the idea of a cultivated family; they preferred to live in it, and rarely used the drawing room, which was much smaller, and was a gold and white sanctuary on the north side of the house, only opened when there was a large party of guests for dancing. Most people came and went without seeing it, and it remained shut up, as much a conjecture as the memory of Northwick's wife. She was supposed to have been taken from him early, to save him and his children from the mortifying consequences of one of those romantic love affairs in which a conscientious man had sacrificed himself to a girl he was certain to outgrow. None of his world knew that his fortunes had been founded upon the dowry she brought him, and upon the stay her belief in him had always been. She was a church member, as such women usually are, but Northwick was really her religion; and as there is nothing that does so much to sanctify a deity as the blind devotion of its worshippers, Northwick was rendered at times worthy of her faith by the intensity of it. In his sort he returned her love; he was not the kind of man whose affections are apt to wander, perhaps because they were few and easily kept together; perhaps because he was really principled against letting them go astray. He was not merely true in a passive way, but he was constant in the more positive fashion. When they began to get on in the world, and his business talent brought him into relations with people much above them socially, he yielded to her shrinking from the opportunities of social advancement that opened to them, and held aloof with her. This kept him a country person in his experiences much longer than he need have remained, and tended to that sort of defensive secretiveness which grew more and more upon him, and qualified his conduct in matters where there was no question of his knowledge of the polite world. It was not until after his wife's death, and until his daughters began to grow up in the circles where his money and his business associations authorized them to move, that he began to see a little of that world. Even then he left it chiefly to his children; for himself he continued quite simply loyal to his wife's memory, and apparently never imagined such a thing as marrying again.

He rose from the chair where he had sat looking up into her pictured face, and went to open the safe near the window. But he stopped in stooping over to work the combination, and glanced out across his shoulder into the night. The familiar beauty of the scene tempted him to the window for what, all at once, he felt might be his last look, though the next instant he was able to argue the feeling down and make his meditated act work into his schemes of early retrieval and honorable return. He must have been thinking there before the fire a long time, for now the moon had risen and shone upon the black bulk of firs to the southward and on the group of outbuildings. These were in a sort the mechanism that transacted the life of his house, ministering to all its necessities and pleasures. Under the conservatories, with their long stretches of glass, catching the moon's rays like levels of water, was the steam furnace that imparted their summer climate, through heavy mains carried below the basement to every chamber of the mansion; a ragged plume of vapor escaped from the tall chimney above them and dishevelled itself in a diaphanous silver on the night breeze. Beyond the hot-houses lay the cold graperies, and off to the left rose the stables; in a cosey nook of this low mass Northwick saw the lights of the coachman's family rooms; beyond the stables were the cow barn and the dairy, with the farmer's cottage; it was a sort of joke with Northwick's business friends that you could buy butter of him sometimes at less than half it cost him, and the joke flattered Northwick's sense of baronial consequence with regard to his place. It was really a farm in extent, and it was mostly a grazing farm; his cattle were in the herd books, and he raised horses, which he would sell now and then to a friend. They were so distinctly varied from the original stock as to form almost a breed of themselves; they numbered scores in his stalls and pastures. The whole group of the buildings was so great that it was like a sort of communal village. In the silent moonlight Northwick looked at it as if it were an expansion or extension of himself, so personally did it seem to represent his tastes and so historical was it of the ambitions of his whole life; he realized that it would be like literally tearing himself from it when he should leave it. That would be the real pang; his children could come to him, but not his home. But he reminded himself that he was going only for a time, until he could rehabilitate himself and come back upon the terms he could easily make when once he was on his feet again. He thought how fortunate it was that in the meanwhile this property could not be alienated; how fortunate it was that he had originally deeded it to his wife in the days when he had the full right to do so, and she had willed it to their children by a perfect entail. The horses and the cattle might go, and probably must go—and he winced to think of it—but the land and the house, all but the furniture and pictures, were the children's and could not be touched. The pictures were his, and would have to go with the horses and cattle; but ten or twelve thousand dollars would replace them, and he must add that sum to his other losses, and bear it as well as he could.

After all, when everything was said and done, he was the chief loser. If he was a thief, as that man said, he could show that he had robbed himself of two dollars for every dollar that he had robbed anybody else of; if now he was going to add to his theft by carrying off the forty-three thousand dollars of the company's which he found himself possessed of, it was certainly not solely in his own interest. It was to be the means of recovering all that had gone before it, and that the very men whom it would enable him to repay finally in full, supposed it to have gone with.

Northwick felt almost a glow of pride in clarifying this point to his reason. The additional theft presented itself almost in the light of a duty; it really was his duty to make reparation to those he had injured. If he had injured any one, and it was his first duty to secure the means of doing it. If that money, which it might almost be said was left providentially in his hands, were simply restored now to the company, it would do comparatively no good at all, and would strip him of every hope of restoring the whole sum he had borrowed. He arrived at that word again, and reenforced by it, he stooped again to work the combination of his safe, and make sure of the money, which he now felt an insane necessity of laying his hands on; but he turned suddenly sick, with a sickness at the heart or at the stomach, and he lifted himself and took a turn about the room.

He perceived that in spite of the outward calm which it had surprised him to find in himself, he was laboring under some strong inward stress, and he must have relief from it if he was to carry this business through. He threw up the window and stood with his hand on the sash, quivering in the strong in-rush of the freezing air. But it strengthened him, and when he put down the window after a few moments, his faintness passed altogether. Still, he thought he would not go through that business at once; there was time enough; he would see his girls and tell them that he was obliged to leave by an early train in the morning.

He took off his shoes and put on his slippers and his house coat, and went to the stair landing outside, and listened to the voices in the library below. He could hear only women's voices, and he inferred that the young man who had been dining with his daughters was gone. He went back into his bedroom and looked into the face of an unmasked thief in his glass. It was not to get that aspect of himself, though, that he looked; it was to see if he was pale or would seem ill to his children.

CHAPTER IV.

Northwick was fond of both his daughters; if he was more demonstrative in meeting the younger, it was because she had the more modern and more urban habit of caressing her father; the elder, who was very much the elder, followed an earlier country fashion of self-possession, and remained silent and seated when he came into the room, though she watched with a pleased interest the exchange of endearments between him and her sister. Her name was Adeline, which was her mother's name, too; and she had the effect of being the aunt of the young girl. She was thin and tall, and she had a New England indigestion which kept her looking frailer than she really was. She conformed to the change of circumstances which she had grown into almost as consciously as her parents, and dressed richly in sufficiently fashionable gowns, which she preferred to have of silk, cinnamon or brown in color; on her slight, bony fingers she wore a good many rings.

Susette was the name of the other daughter; her mother had fancied that name; but the single monosyllable it had been shortened into somehow suited the proud-looking girl better than the whole name, with its suggestion of coquettishness.

She asked, "Why didn't you come down papa? Mr. Wade was calling, and he stayed to dinner." She smiled, and it gave him a pang to see that she seemed unusually happy; he could have borne better, he perceived, to leave her miserable; at least, then, he would not have wholly made her so.

"I had some matters to look after," he said. "I thought I might get down before he went."

A deep leathern armchair stood before the hearth where the young rector had been sitting, with the ladies at either corner of the mantel; Northwick let himself sink into it, and with a glance at the face of the faintly ticking clock on the black marble shelf before him, he added casually, "I must get an early train for Ponkwasset in the morning, and I still have some things to put in shape."

"Is there any trouble there?" the girl asked from the place she had resumed. She held by one hand from the corner of the mantel, and let her head droop over on her arm. Her father had a sense of her extraordinary beauty, as a stranger might have had.

"Trouble?" he echoed.

"With the hands."

"Oh, no; nothing of that sort. What made you think so?" asked Northwick, rapidly exploring the perspective opened up in his mind by her question, to see if it contained any suggestion of advantage to him. He found an instant's relief in figuring himself called to the mills by a labor trouble.

"That tiresome little wretch of a Putney is going about circulating all sorts of reports."

"There is no reason as yet to suppose the strike will affect us," said Northwick. "But I think I had better be on the ground."

"I should think you could leave it to the superintendent," said the girl, "without wearing your own life out about it."

"I suppose I might," said Northwick, with an effect of refusing to acquire merit by his behavior, "but the older hands all know me so well that——"

He stopped as if it were unnecessary to go on, and the elder daughter said: "He is on one of his sprees again. I should think something ought to be done about him for his family's sake, if nothing else. Elbridge told James that you almost drove over him coming up."

"Yes," said Northwick. "I didn't see him until he started up under the horses' feet."

"He will get killed some of these days," said Adeline, with the sort of awful satisfaction in realizing a catastrophe which delicate women often feel.

"It would be the best thing for him," said her sister, "and for his family, too. When a man is nothing but a burden and a disgrace to himself and everybody belonging to him, he had better die as soon as possible."

Northwick sat looking into his daughter's beautiful face, but he saw the inflamed and heated visage of the President of the Board, and he heard him saying: "The best thing that could happen to you on your way home would be a good railroad accident."

He sighed faintly and said: "We can't always tell. I presume it isn't for us to say." He went on, with that leniency for the shortcomings of others which we feel when we long for mercy to our own: "Putney is a very able man; one of the ablest lawyers in the State, and very honest. He could be almost anything if he would let liquor alone. I don't wish to judge him. He may have"—Northwick sighed again, and ended vaguely—"his reasons."

Suzette laughed. "How moderate you always are, papa! And how tolerant!"

"I guess Mr. Putney knows pretty well whom he's got to deal with, and that he's safe in abusing you all he likes," said Adeline. "But I don't see how such respectable people as Dr. Morrell and Mrs. Morrell can tolerate him. I've no patience with Dr. Morrell, or his wife, either. To be sure, they tolerate Mrs. Wilmington, too."

Suzette went over to her father to kiss him. "Well, I'm going to bed, papa. If you wanted more of my society you ought to have come down sooner. I suppose I shan't see you in the morning; so it's good-by as well as good night. When will you be home?"

"Not for some days, perhaps," said the unhappy man.

"How doleful! Are you always so homesick when you go away?"

"Not always; no."

"Well, try to cheer up this time, then. And if you have to be gone a great while send for me, won't you?"

"Yes, yes; I will," said Northwick. The girl gave his head a hug, and then glided out of the room. She stopped to throw him a kiss from the door.

"There!" said Adeline. "I didn't mean to let Mrs. Wilmington slip out; she can't bear the name, and I know it drove her away. But you mustn't let it worry you, father. I guess it's all going well now."

"What's going well?" Northwick asked, vaguely.

"The Jack Wilmington business. I know she's really given him up at last; and we can't be too thankful for that much, if it's no more. I don't believe he's bad, for all the talk about him, but he's been weak, and that's a thing she couldn't forgive in a man; she's so strong herself."

Northwick did not think of Wilmington; he thought of himself, and in the depths of his guilty soul, in those secret places underneath all his pretences, where he really knew himself a thief, he wondered if his child's strength would be against her forgiving his weakness. What we greatly dread we most unquestioningly believe; and it did not occur to him to ask whether impatience with weakness was a necessary inference from strength. He only knew himself to be miserably weak.

He rose and stood a moment by the mantel, with his impassive, handsome face turned toward his daughter as if he were going to speak to her. He was a tall man, rather thin; he was clean shaven, except for the grayish whiskers just forward of his ears and on a line with them; he had a regular profile, which was more attractive than the expression of his direct regard. He took up a crystal ball that lay on the marble, and looked into it as if he were reading his future in its lucid depths, and then put it down again with an effect of helplessness. When he spoke it was not in connection with what his daughter had been talking about. He said almost dryly: "I think I will go up and look over some papers I have to take with me, and then try to get a little sleep before I start."

"And when shall we expect you back?" asked his daughter, submissively accepting his silence concerning her sister's love affairs. She knew that it meant acquiescence in anything that Sue and she thought best.

"I don't know exactly; I can't say now. Good night."

To her surprise he came up and kissed her; his caresses were for Sue, and she expected them no more than she invited them. "Why, father!" she said in a pleased voice.

"Let James pack the small bag for me, and send Elbridge to me in about an hour," he said, as he went out into the hall.

CHAPTER V.

Northwick was now 59 years old, but long before he reached this age he had seen many things to make him doubt the moral government of the universe. His earliest instruction had been such as we all receive. He had been taught to believe that there was an overruling power which would punish him if he did wrong and reward him if he did right; or would, at least, be displeased in one case and pleased in the other. The precept took primarily the monitory form, and first enforced the fact of the punishment or the displeasure; there were times when the reward or the pleasure might not sensibly follow upon good behavior, but evil behavior never escaped the just consequences. This was the doctrine which framed the man's intention if not his conduct of life, and continued to shape it years after experience of the world, and especially of the business world, had gainsaid it. He had seen a great many cases in which not only good behavior had apparently failed of its reward, but bad behavior had failed of its punishment. In the case of bad behavior, his observation had been that no unhappiness, not even any discomfort, came from it unless it was found out; for the most part it was not found out. This did not shake Northwick's principles; he still intended to do right, so as to be on the safe side, even in a remote and improbable contingency; but it enabled him to compromise with his principles and to do wrong provisionally and then repair the wrong before he was found out, or before the overruling power noticed him.

But now there were things that made him think, in the surprising misery of being found out, that this power might have had its eye upon him all the time, and was not sleeping, or gone upon a journey, as he had tacitly flattered himself. It seemed to him that there was even a dramatic contrivance in the circumstances to render his anguish exquisite. He had not read many books, but sometimes his daughters made him go to the theatre, and once he had seen the play of "Macbeth." The people round him were talking about the actor who played the part of *Macbeth*, but Northwick kept his mind critically upon the play, and it seemed to him false to what he had seen of life in having all those things happen just so, to fret the conscience and torment the soul of the guilty man; he thought that in reality they would not have been quite so pat; it gave him rather a low opinion of Shakespeare, lower than he would have dared to have if he had been a more cultivated man. Now that play came back into his mind, and he owned with a pang that it was all true. He was being quite as aptly visited for his transgression; his heart was being wrung, too, by the very things that could hurt it most. He had not been very well of late, and was not feeling physically strong; his anxieties had preyed upon him, and he had never felt the need of the comfort and quiet of his home so much as now when he was forced to leave it. Never had it all been so precious; never had the beauty and luxury of it seemed so great. All that was nothing, though, to the thought of his children, especially of that youngest child, whom his heart was so wrapt up in, to whom he was going to leave shame and ruin. The words she had spoken from her pride in him, her ignorant censure of that drunkard, as a man who had better die since he had become nothing but a burden and disgrace to his family, stung on as if by incessant repetition. He had crazy thoughts, impulses, fantasies, in which he swiftly dreamed renunciation of escape. Then he knew that it would not avail anything to remain; it would not avail anything even to die; nothing could avail anything at once, but in the end his going would avail most. He must go; it would break the child's heart to face his shame, and she must face it. He did not think of his eldest daughter, except to think that the impending disaster could not affect her so ruinously.

"My God, my God!" he groaned, as he went up stairs. Adeline called from the room he had left, "Did you speak, father?"

He had a conscience, that mechanical conscience which becomes so active in times of great moral obliquity, against telling a little lie, and saying he had not spoken. He went on up stairs without answering anything. He indulged the self pity a little longer of feeling himself an old man forced from his home, and he had a blind reasonless resentment of the behavior of the men who were driving him away, and whose interests, even at that moment, he was mindful of. But he threw off this mood when he entered his room and settled himself to business. There was a good deal to be done in the arrangement of papers for his indefinite absence, and he used the same care in providing for some minor contingencies in the company's affairs as in leaving instructions to his children for their action until they should hear from him again. Afterward this curious scrupulosity became a matter of comment among those privy to it; some held it another proof of the ingrained rascality of the man, a trick to suggest lenient construction of his general conduct in the management of the company's finances; others saw in it an interesting example of the involuntary operation of business instincts which persisted at a juncture when the man might be supposed to have been actuated only by the most intensely selfish motives.

The question was not settled even in the final retrospect when it appeared that at the very moment when Northwick showed himself mindful of the company's interests on those minor points he was defrauding it further in the line of his defalcations, and kee ing back a large sum of money that belong to it. But at that moment Northwick did n consider that this money necessarily belong to the company any more than his daugh house and farm belonged to it. To be sure was the fruit of money he had borrowed or tak from the company and had used in an e mously successful deal; but the company h not earned it, and in driving him into a corn in forcing him to make instant restitution all its involuntary loans, it was justifying h in withholding this part of them. Northw was a man of too much sense to reason plicity to this effect, but there was a sophis tacitly at work in him to this effect, wh made it possible for him to go on and ste more where he had already stolen so muc In fact it presented the further theft as a s of duty. This sum, large as it was, real amounted to nothing in comparison with t sum he owed the company; but it formed h only means of restitution, and if he did n take it and use it to that end he might be ho recreant to his moral obligations. He co tended, from that vestibule of his soul whe he was not a thief, with that self of his inmo where he was a thief, that it was all most fo tunate, if not providential, as it had fallen o Not only had his broker sent him that la check for his winnings in stocks the day b fore, but Northwick had, contrary to his cu tom, cashed the check and put the money his safe instead of banking it. Now he cou perceive a leading in the whole matt though at the time it seemed a flagrant de ance of chance, and a sort of invitation burglars. He seemed to himself like a bur lar, when he had locked the doors and pull down the curtains, and stood before the sa working the combination. He trembled, an when at last the mechanism announced i effect, with a slight click of a withdrawi bolt, he gave a violent start. At the sa time there came a rough knock at the do and Northwick called out in the choking coherent voice of one suddenly roused fr sleep: "Hello! Who's there? What is it?"

"It's me," said Elbridge.

"Oh, yes! Well! All right! Hold on a min ute! Ah—you can come back in ten or fifte minutes. I'm not quite ready for you yet." Northwick spoke the first broken sentence from the safe, where he stood in a frenzy dismay; the more collected words were ut tered from his desk, where he ran to get h pistol. He did not know why he thought E bridge might try to force his way in; perha it was because any presence on the outside the door would have terrified him. He ha time to recognize that he was not afraid fo the money, but that he was afraid for himse in the act of taking it.

Elbridge gave a cough on the other side the door, and said, with a little hesitation, "A right," and Northwick heard him tramp aw and go down stairs.

He went back to the safe and pulled ope the heavy door, whose resistance helped hi shake off his nervousness. Then he took th money from the drawer where he had laid counted it, slipped it into the inner pocket his waistcoat, and buttoned it in there. H shut the safe and locked it. The succession these habitual acts calmed him more an more, and after he had struck a match an kindled the fire on his hearth, which he ha hitherto forgotten, he was able to settle agai to his preparations in writing.

(To be continued.)

HE HAS A MANIA FOR TRAVEL.

Once Rich, He Now Carries Brick, Tha He May Be Able to Visit Cameroon.

A unique laborer is helping build the ne railway station at Pankow, near Berlin. He Herr Behrens, sometime millionaire, now un der guardianship in consequence of his spend thrift habits, and able to reach legally only th interest of his little capital of $15,000.

Herr Behrens has a remarkable history About fifteen years ago he received from hi father's estate some $500,000, enough to mak him a German millionaire. He at once bega to indulge the hobby of his life. He went t the North Cape, Sicily, North and South Rus sia, all over France and Austria, and throug Greece, Turkey, and the Balkans. Then, aft a tour of Great Britain, he sailed for Indi He was in Asia five years, wandering fro city to city and from country t ountry, event ually leaving Yokohama for S Francisco. few months sufficed to gratify Herr Behrens curiosity as to the United States, and he cu down through Mexico and Central America t the South American States, which he "did" thoroughly, with the one exception of Pata gonia. Altogether he passed four years be tween the Argentine Republic and Alaska, an then went over the South Seas, with occasiona stops at Pacific islands; passed through th Mediterranean, and brought up in Marseille with only $50,000.

He returned to Berlin for a few days, an then continued his travels, but with an eve shortening radius, for his funds were runnin low. Remonstrances of friends against hi crazy mode of life were useless. He sa houses stifled him, and he felt like himse only on shipboard or in a railway carriag His garments were threadbare, and his de for his travelling paraphernalia were increa ing rapidly. Still he would not stop. So hi friends got a court to declare him incompe tent to manage his property, and to appoint guardian to keep him from reducing himsel to a pauper.

Behrens had to submit, despite the fact th he had been seized by an almost uncontroll ble desire to look over the German colonies i Africa. He did a good deal of hard thinkin for several months, and about three week ago, when walking in the suburbs, came up the gang of men who are putting up the Pan kow station. Here was his chance to get to gether funds for his African journey, and h took it. After some difficulty he convince Contractor Battman that he was eager fo work, and got employment at 72½ cents a day

Every pleasant afternoon Herr Behrens i the centre of attraction of a little group o friends of his family, who drive out from th city to see him carry planks and brick an rails or sift sand. Sundays and holidays h gets into his good clothes, calls on his friend and tells them how rapidly the fund for hi African tour is accumulating.

NEWSPAPER WAR ON "LOHENGRIN."

French Journalists Describe William II. i Silver Armor Among His Heralds.

The heat of the fight of the ultra patriot French newspapers against "Lohengrin" ca hardly be appreciated without a glance at the columns. On the day before the evening of th presentation of the opera, the *Intransigea* headed its protest thus in letters a finger long

Les Prussiens à l'Opéra!
Apothéose de Wagner, l'insulteur de la France!

The *Revanche* had bigger letters in its head lines and more of them, but the sentiment wa about the same. The celebrated poster go out by the patriots was as follows:

NATIONAL-OPERNTHEATER
(Théâtre national de l'Opéra)
Ce Soir
Mercredi le 16 septembre 1891
par ordre du Ministère
et sous le haut patronage
de S. M. L'Empereur d'Allemagne Roi de Prusse
1re représentation
de
LOHENGRIN
Drame lyrique en quatre actes
Par
RICHARD WAGNER
Auteur de UNE CAPITULATION
Insulteur de la France vaincue.

AVIS. La direction a l'honneur d'informer le public que, pour cette première représentation, les bureaux ne seront pas ouverts, toutes les places ayant été retenues par les délégués des VEREINE et par la préfecture de Police.

A story originated by the *Agence Libre* for the occasion is worth preserving. It is this:

"In proof of the admiration of the Emperor William for Wagner, we need only to relate that immediately after he ascended the throne he created a corps of heralds who wear mediæval uniforms, whose duty consists in standing ready in the imperial salons to greet the Emperor upon his entrance to or departure from the castle or palace. This fanfare from silver and gold trumpets is taken from the operas of Wagner. This corps of heralds is forty strong, and is commanded by Master of the Horse Von Chelius, who is a prominent trumpet virtuoso. Ten of these heralds accompany the Emperor on all his journeys. It gives the Emperor the greatest pleasure to encase himself in silver Lohengrin armor and standing among his heralds to listen to the fanfare."